100 of FIG. 1 will now be described with reference to block diagram FIG. 2.

In the tele-inventory system 100 of FIG. 2, the shop is equipped with a control computer 10A, a clerk computer 10B, a TV camera 20A, a camera positioning device 21A, and a manipulator 30A. The control computer 10A and the clerk computer 10B are connected to inventory computers 50A and 50B via a LAN (Local Area Network) 40 and/or a telephone line 60.

The control computer 10A, the TV camera 20A, the camera positioning device 21A, and the manipulator 30A are disposed at an individual selling area of a shop. The clerk computer 10B is disposed in the individual selling area, at a backoffice or at a common room of clerks, and is communicably connected to the control computer 10A via the LAN 40.

A combination of the control computer 10A and the clerk computer 10B serves to function as the above-mentioned in-shop terminal 10 (FIG. 1). In the illustrated embodiment, the control computer 10A and the clerk computer 10B are separate; however a computer, such as a personal computer, may serve to function as an overall control computer 10A and clerk computer 10B.

The TV camera 20A serves to function as the

camera section 20 of FIG. 1, and is able to zoom in and out on an object of which an image is to be taken. The TV camera 20A is mounted to the camera positioning device 21A that controls the position and the posture of the TV camera 20A (the direction of image capture). A further description of the camera positioning device 21A will be made with reference to FIGS. 4A and 4B.

The manipulator 30a serves to function as the above-mentioned manipulator section 30 of FIG. 1 and its function will be described in more detail later with reference to FIGS. 5A and 5B.

The control computer 10A comprises a communication controller 11A, a camera controller 13A, motor drivers 13a and 15a, a commodity position database 14A,a manipulator controller 15A, an A/D (analog-to-digital) converter 17A, an image memory 18A and an image compression device 19A. The control computer 10A is a personal computer including an image-capture board, a motor-controlling board, and a LAN board. Execution of predetermined software by the personal computer realizes respective functions of the elements of the control computer 10A.

The communication controller 11A serves to function as at least the image transmitter 11 and the instruction receiver 12. The communication

controller 11A transmits images of a selling area, which image is taken by the TV camera 20A, to the inventory computers 50A and 50B, and receives instructions from the inventory computers 50A and 50B.

The communication controller 11A is communicably connected to the inventory computer 50A and the respective customer information terminals 70 via a modem 11a and the telephone line 60, and is also communicably connected to the clerk computer 10B and the inventory computer 50B via the LAN 40. The modem 11a is interposed between the control computer 10A and the telephone line 60 in the illustrated example; however the control computer 10A may also serve to function as the modem 11a assuming an internal element.

The camera controller 13A and the motor driver 15a jointly serve to function as the above-mentioned camera control section 13. The camera controller 13A controls zoom-in/out operations of the TV camera 20A by issuing zoom-in/out instructions to the TV camera 20A based on instructions external from the control computer 10A. The camera controller 13A issues a driving instruction to a non-illustrated driving motor of the camera positioning device 21A via the motor driver 15a and obtains information about a current position of the TV camera 20A to